

Seattle's Central Waterfront Plan

Summary of Public Forum #1

Thursday June 26, 2003

Bell Harbor International Conference Center, Pier 66

Welcome/Overview of Planning process

- Jeanne Krikawa, Seattle Planning Commission
- Diane Sugimura, Director, Dept of Design Construction and Land Use
- Mayor Gregory J. Nickels

The Waterfront Experience: an Interactive Visioning Exercise for the waterfront

Sharon Sutton, Seattle Design Commission

Participants worked in groups to look at the waterfront from the perspectives of 14 different types of users. Within these groups they placed dots on maps of the waterfront to identify; things that work, things that don't work, and opportunities for the future.

Common observations/ideas

- Want to touch the water
- Want safe places of refuge
- Want public destinations
- Want buffers between pedestrians and traffic
- Want wider sidewalks
- Want benches, trees and resting areas
- Dislike conflicts between transit modes/pedestrians
- Dislike parking lots and areas beneath the viaduct
- Like waterfront views and smells
- Want more connections between downtown and the waterfront
- Dislike pedestrian disconnect at industrial areas around terminal 46

Tourists

- want directions/signage to downtown destinations
- want directions/signage to neighborhoods
- want places to stroll
- want more small parks along the water
- dislike sidewalks that are too close to busy traffic
- dislike areas that are too touristy

10-year old children

- like to watch the cruise ships and sailboats
- want a wading pool
- more places for bathroom breaks
- dislike scary traffic

- like concentration of activities (food, retail, and boats) in close walking distance between pier 57 and pier 54
- want a view tower to climb

Parents with toddlers

- like Ivar's picnic area – it's a good place for toddlers
- dislike the lack of toddler destinations on the waterfront other than aquarium
- dislike that Myrtle Edwards Park and the Sculpture Garden do not offer much for toddlers
- dislike that pedestrian destinations are not well defined
- want a place to watch the train
- dislike that connections up the hill are difficult
- want a water taxi along the waterfront

Marine biologists/divers

- want a restored seal habitat
- want new aquarium to be more water friendly
- do not want a sheer seawall
- want diving obstacles, and/or a tidal area with a viaduct reef
- want to extend the parks north to connect to the dive area at NOAA or fisheries

Disabled

- want parking lot access to Myrtle Edwards
- want vistas of the waterfront from a wheelchair level
- want enhanced access to North end of the waterfront through sculpture park design
- want visual access for those who cannot get to the waterfront
- like elevators at Lenora and Bell which help conquer the grade

Ferry Workers/Commuters

- want area of respite for ferry workers
- want more desirable ferry waiting area that captures waterfront views
- want businesses that support commuters
- want more emphasis at passenger ferry
- want directional signage for commuters and signage to places of interest
- want bicycle commuter connections
- want a better façade for the ferry terminal

Senior Citizens

- dislike bike/pedestrian conflicts
- want bike/pedestrian separation at Myrtle Edwards Park
- want restrooms
- dislike crossing multiple streets and railroad
- want added trolley stops to connect waterfront to Denny regrade
- like "million dollar" views from piers
- like waterfront parks with places to sit and people watch
- want more street furniture and places to rest

Young Couples

- want outdoor happy hour with sunset views

- want romantic pauses and places to kiss
- like the tips of the piers
- want to connect the stadiums to the waterfront
- want places to stroll
- want things to do
- want a picnic spot

College Students

- dislike Washington St. Pier because it is isolated noisy and smelly
- dislike Steinbruek Park because it is noisy and taken over by homeless
- want picnics, views and exhibits at the sculpture park
- want "Spanish Steps" from Pike Place Market to the waterfront
- like the ferry terminal for salty air, french fries, and street performers
- like Pike Place market for eating, people watching, buskers, and views
- like the Seattle Art Museum for dates, exhibits, and introspection

Kayakers

- want zones of safety which could work for both kayakers and salmon
- want floating docks, terracing, kayak storage and rentals
- want an interpretive route for kayakers and another for pedestrians
- want an island rest stop
- want to buffer the seawall
- want a channel for salmon and kayaks

Hip – Hoppers

- want places to express themselves, to display and be seen
- want a graffiti park
- want flexible unstructured open space for music, skateboarding, and entertainers
- dislike pier areas that are touristy upscale and gated
- want a skate park
- want younger oriented concerts/performance
- like connections to downtown at Pike Place Market

Homeless Families

- want hassle-free overnight parking
- want public open space around pier 69
- want restrooms
- want showers and changing stations
- want a tent city/overnight camping
- want free trolley/transportation
- want more police patrols/security
- want family shelters
- want daycare
- dislike gentrification
- dislike areas that are dark, uninviting, or unsafe for families, such as occidental park
- like welcoming public spaces
- like affordable retail at Pike Place Market
- like shelters and services in Pioneer Square and mid-Belltown

Wildlife(not stray dogs)

- want a shallow beach refuge
- want rock outcrops
- want big tree canopies
- dislike humans messing up their homes
- want continuous tree coverage to other parks
- dislike dumping
- want places to perch
- want a sonar free zone
- want improved water quality
- want habitat everywhere, including plants that provide food
- want salmon corridors and hiding places

Bikers

- want bike rental at Myrtle Edwards Park
- want smoother railroad crossings
- dislike high speed traffic on Western Ave. and Elliot Ave.
- like southbound bike lane on 2nd Ave
- want bike amenities in condos to encourage biking
- want more bike racks
- want separate lanes for fast bikers, walkers, slow bikers, and kids on bikes
- want bikes to be a priority mode for waterfront travel
- want a bike station at the ferry terminal
- want a bike trail on terminal 46
- dislike that WASHDOT charges too much for bicycle access
- want to move car ferries to terminal 47
- like existing bike rentals and bike stations

Summary

Some general themes that were common to all of the groups were discussed at the end of the evening. These themes were as follows:

Public Spaces

Everyone should have access to the waterfront. Major spaces should be free of charge and safe.

Connections

There should be clear connections between the water and the city. These connections should be visual as well as physical. Connections between different modes of transportation should also be clear.

Diversity of Uses

The waterfront should be a mixed use area that serves both locals and tourists. The waterfront should not cater to one single use or one single group of users.

Ecology

The natural ecology of the waterfront should be restored and celebrated.

Transportation

Transportation on water should be linked to transportation on land at the waterfront. The waterfront should accommodate all modes of transportation.

The Rallying Cry

David Spiker, Seattle Design Commission

Saturday June 28, 2003

Bell Harbor International Conference Center, Pier 66

Welcome

- C.R. Douglas, moderator
- Jeanne Krikawa, Seattle Planning Commission
- Tim Ceis, Deputy Mayor
- Tom Tierney, Port of Seattle

The Viaduct/Seawall Project

Bob Chandler, City of Seattle, Department of Transportation

John Rahaim, City of Seattle, CityDesign/Design, Construction and Land Use

Keynote address

Michael Sorkin, Architect, Urban Designer, Author

Singularity

- waterfront development risks becoming generic and formulaic
- all waterfronts do not need to have an aquarium, fish restaurants and an ornamental trolley
- what do we draw from to form an authentic original vision?
- Art is unique and specific
- Climate and environment are also unique

Mixed Use

- all uses are theoretically compatible
- the city becomes a loft condition
- need to create a flexible armature for mixing people and activities
- the waterfront is a gradient not a seam

Transportation

- the waterfront should be designed as an armature for movement
- are the 12-16 lanes of traffic in the viaduct alternatives really necessary?
- The viaduct is an opportunity to develop a whole new block along the waterfront
- we should understand, not romanticize, the waterfront's history
- we are free to interpret the history of the waterfront through the artifacts that we think are important

Urban Form and Order

- Cities can be designed without being too specific about use
- There is a human scale that should guide development regardless of its use
- The successful city has many centers
- Democratic cities allow for chance occurrences
- The accidental protects us from authoritarianism
- Clear edges are critical to cities
- The waterfront is a definitive edge
- Art helps counter the modernist notion that there is a single deducible form for a city

Transportation Mix and Urban Form

- Trains and cars were not designed to respond to cities
- Cities have had to adapt to accommodate them
- The type of transportation you provide depends on the type of city you want to create
- We tend to separate or modes of transportation
- How much can we mix different transit modes?
- Transportation must be sustainable, safe, and democratic

Waterfront Form

- Need to think about the waterfront in section
- There are two types of waterfront development
- Santa Monica is dense but low
- Chicago/Rio de Janeiro has very tall buildings
- Buildings need to distort themselves to invite and accommodate the landscape

Process/Priorities

- What is the minimal intervention that will leverage a transformation?
- We should not be limited by existing models for waterfront development
- We should explore new options
- The responsibility of professionals is to raise the public expectations for what is possible
- Be wary of highways that are only renamed as boulevards
- How can the waterfront be useful for transportation in the city?
- Resist the pressure to develop the site intensively
- Nothing is often a powerful and meaningful form of something

Questions and Answers

Q: Can you give examples of vertical zoning in cities?

A: All cities have some differentiation in use between the ground floor, upper floors, and subterranean areas.

Q: People talk a lot about the unique experience of the city as seen from the viaduct. Would we be losing something if we tear it down?

A: The subterranean scheme for the viaduct is a strong solution. There is the potential to layer occupy the space in many layers.

Q: What types of activities drive waterfront spaces in the winter?

A: There aren't any particular indoor uses that are best. This brings up again the issue again of whether you want to develop the block of the viaduct as additional indoor building space.

Q: In terraced development on a steep waterfront like this, how should you build?

A: The character of the section is very important. You need to ask whether there are rights to views. Do you want to legislate to preserve existing views? You can start by doing an inventory of existing views. Vertical circulation is also critical. You might consider a funicular or other circulation device. But, you should be cautious of choosing one single strategy to solve the problem.

Q: What role should zoning play?

A: The central issue of planning is finessing the mix. There are many ways of doing this including nudging, demanding, legislating, and bonusing. The zoning should not be too restrictive and preclude future changes in use, but the uses should not be arbitrary either. The mix of uses should not be entirely driven by market forces. There needs to be finessing.

Panel Discussion: response to keynote address, and comments from audience

Urban Economy: Kriss Sjoblom, WA Research Council

Urban Ecology/Sustainability: Gary Lawrence, ARUP

Integrated Transportation: Gordon Price, former Councilor, City of Vancouver BC Community

Culture, Public Space: Milenko Matanovic, Pomegranate Center

Urban Economy

- Cities used to be focused around transportation nodes
- Cars and trucks have allowed dispersal of activities away from the center
- Seattle was founded as a commercial city focused on the waterfront
- Mosquito fleet was important transportation in 19th century
- The waterfront is losing it's 19th century role as a transportation hub
- What is the role of the waterfront in the future?
- The city is now becoming important as a center of the creation of intellectual property rather than of transporting goods

Urban Ecology

- Sustainability is an attempt to develop a broader understanding
- It is not necessarily about finding a balance
- It is about understanding all of the different systems
- In one sense sustainability is an inevitability
- The question is – Can we sustain human habitation in a way that we would prefer?
- Many natural habitats have been permanently destroyed
- Some habitats can still be preserved
- Sustainability is about success not about winning
- Success is a group term whereas winning is an individual term
- There are no experts about the future
- What future do you want to have?
- We need to hold close to the concept of doubt
- As soon as we stop doubting our ideas we close ourselves off to other ideas and become fundamentalists
- We have no right to decide how the future ought to live

Integrated Transportation

- In Seattle's waterfront the vertical may be more important than the horizontal
- There is a tremendous opportunity to develop different ways of moving up and down , maybe a funicular
- The rail lines are going to stay, so wherever you cross the railroad you will concentrate activity
- The removal of the viaduct will not change that
- Seattle's waterfront has tremendous diversity which needs to be preserved
- Sydney's Circular Key is a good model for waterfront circulation
- Seattle has a transportation dividend because of all of the new public transportation projects

- There is an opportunity to reduce the amount of space that is allocated to cars
- If you don't claim that space now, you will never get it back

Community, Culture, Public Space

- Jazz is the authentic American art form
- We need to create spaces that dance not just with people, but with light and water
- We have forgotten our responsibility to the communal whole
- We need to create multiple centers
- Communal spaces where people bump into each other are the wetlands for new relationships
- It is vital to have extensive public involvement
- The process should be like a ping-pong game
- The public should define the structure of the project, the big move, or the DNA
- Designers need to raise the level of expectation and return it to the people
- We need to make sure to include all of the elements in the waterfront
- Cannot include one element to the exclusion of the others
- We should create a "great meal out of many ingredients"

Questions from the moderator

CD: A major law firm just moved their offices to pier 70. Is that interesting to you? Do you think this is the right future for the waterfront?

KS: I wonder why they want to be there. Typically there is an economic of agglomeration where a law firm benefits from being near other law firms. From the waterfront's perspective it's a good thing. It's good to have people who eat at the restaurants in the winter.

CD: Why is Seattle's waterfront a touristy waterfront? Is it because that's what the market supports?

KS: It must be.

CD: How do we transition to a waterfront that locals use as well?

GP: In Vancouver at Granville Island it was designed for the locals, and the tourists liked it too. We kept as much industry as wanted to stay and then developed the rest with anything else except chain stores.

CD: Is there housing on Granville Island?

GP: There is housing all around it, but not on it.

CD: Are you happy with the public spaces on the waterfront?

MM: There is a difference between public spaces and gathering spaces. Public spaces are respites from the city. Gathering places need to accommodate everyone. Other cultures, such as in the Mediterranean have much better gathering places.

CD: Do you envision one signature gathering space for the waterfront?

MM: The gathering space should be an artwork in itself. It needs to work when there is no event being held there.

CD: What do you think of pier 62-63 where they have concerts on the pier? That space doesn't seem to work when there is no event.

MM: That space is only designed for one particular use.

CD: What do you think is the biggest environmental problem facing the waterfront right now?

GL: There are toxic sediments from historic uses on the waterfront that are toxic to aquatic environments. There are opportunities to mitigate this in the future development of the waterfront. Noise is another issue, but the biggest problem is non-point solutions that affect the water.

CD: How deeply do we move to restore salmon habitats, or is it unrealistic to think that we can restore them?

GL: The Duwamish was and still is very important for many types of fish, not just salmon. The waterways in downtown have been piped which makes big salmon runs an unlikely possibility in the future.

CD: If the viaduct is tunneled and there is a new block to develop, what is the right type of use? Are we wasting potential tax revenue if we don't build on it.

KS: The value of that land is probably on the order of 10's of millions of dollars. If we spend 10's of billions to create 10's of millions worth of land we aren't gaining anything. We should ask if we want to spend what you could sell that land for to buy open space. In effect that is what the situation would be if we decide not to build on it. Many people may think that that would be worthwhile.

CD: Have we divided up transit modes too much? What would you envision for a future transit hub?

GP: It should be layered with uses mixed up. People love to look at other people, to the extent that you can do that with cars it is a good idea.

CD: There is an upside and a downside to the ferry terminal. On the upside it brings a lot of pedestrians to the area. On the downside it also brings a lot of cars. Should you move it?

GP: First I would ask if the cars are paying their way. Then I would ask what the cost of moving it would be.

GL: From a transportation point of view it might be the right thing to move it, it there are other impacts. Kitsap County has a large stock of affordable housing. If you make it harder for people to walk to work from the ferry you create a larger problem.

KS: The pedestrians on the ferries are important to the life of the waterfront. You want them in the center. Symbolically it is important to have them in the center.

CD: What would make the waterfront more interesting, vibrant and attractive for locals?

MM: More greenery and a mix of uses including housing. The mix should not be seen as chaos, but as jazz. You could dock the Kalakala at the waterfront and use it as a homeless shelter.

GP: You should anchor it on every side with 15,000 inhabitants. You need a critical mass of people who are moving through the space. You need a density of population on lake union, and across the water.

GL: People need to feel responsible for the success of the waterfront. You need workers during the day, and a residential community to be the eyes and ears of the streets. You need to make people feel like they own it. You need to increase the intensity of people who are there.

KS: You need businesses that people who live in the city will frequent.

CD: Do we have enough destination entertainment facilities? Is there anything we are forgetting?

KS: No.

Questions from the Audience

Q: Elliot Bay and Puget Sound are living systems. There is a huge opportunity to restore the health of the bay. We do not need to view the restoration of the bay as moving back to a past state.

We just need to restore the health of the system. We do not need to be as modest as Gary in assuming that we cannot create a salmon habitat. We have more than an urban design question, we have an ecological question. Ecology has to be much more integrated than we have seen in the process so far.

GL: There are avian systems and many others which need to be considered in addition to aquatic systems. In the past we have not been good at being honest about the trade offs involved. In Seattle we tend to avoid conflicts and then get policies that are too general to be actionable. We need to make choices.

Q: Based on the growth management act we are trying to encourage more people to live downtown. To do this we need green space, grocery stores, and places to gather. Downtown Seattle has the least open space of any major city in the US. How can these elements act to attract people to the city?

GP: You need to give them everything they can get in the suburbs, and then you will have more, because as a city you have things that you cannot get in the suburbs. 15,000 is the number of people it takes to support a full service grocery store. Once people start coming you get a virtuous cycle where one good thing builds on another. Soon you are battling the problems of success.

MM: We are creatures of imagination. We need metaphors or our imagination is impoverished. We should recreate some wilderness. This is the metaphor of otherness that we need to relate to.

GL: We need to have a notion of patience. Changes made 20 years ago in city zoning have only now started to produce the urban elements that they were intended to create. We are creating the groundwork for the evolution of the waterfront, not laying out a plan.

Q: The places I like best have individual shops that aren't franchised. I'm interested in Granville Island. Can we zone to prohibit franchises?

GP: Granville Island is federally owned. The city would not have the power to discriminate. The city would only have the power to say it had to be a restaurant, for example, but not that it couldn't be McDonald's. San Francisco has restricted franchises.

MS: A local content law could help. For instance South Korea has a local content agreement with Boeing that a minimum percentage of the final product is made locally.

Q: Seattle Center is an important destination. Is there any thought of having a hotel that would serve both the waterfront and Seattle center?

GL: The market should recognize that opportunity, and once there is enough demand someone will probably build a hotel.

Q: There should be an homage to Native Americans incorporated into the waterfront. The waterfront is a very important archeological site and it is fitting that we commemorate the role that Native Americans have played in Seattle's history.

Q: The waterfront is constantly changing. We want a waterfront that can adapt to that change. How do we design a waterfront that is the place we want it to be without watering it down? Do we need a specific direction, or can we try to make it all happen?

GL: You need courage. Barcelona has had the courage to be challenging about the future. You need the courage to think that design actually matters as an expression of who we are. You need a point of view about design mattering. It's hard in Seattle which has a history of democratizing that doesn't result in good design. There is the danger of creating a waterfront that doesn't make anyone angry, but that no one likes. You need to have the courage to do it, and maybe get it wrong.

MS: There is a difference between theme-ing and designing. Theme-ing is creates false singularities, but design creates authentic uniqueness. Planning is odd because in some ways it is a subtractive process. You need to think of very particular as well as very large issues at the same time.

MM: Jazz is a useful metaphor. It's very democratic, but everyone can't just do anything they want. There is an agreement about common terms such as key and beat. You need to allow for virtuosity and common scale. The scheme should be developed collectively, but individuals should be given the opportunity to create it.

CL: Is there a theme to Granville island?

GP: There is a singular owner, and there is also a theme of preserving the industrial heritage. The idea was that it would never be complete. The focus of Seattle's waterfront could be creating an institute for best practices for waterfronts. The viaduct also requires that you make a fundamental decision about the waterfront.

Q: How are we going to respond to the really big earthquake? How is homeland security going to affect the waterfront in the future?

GP: You can't plan for the really big one. Everything will come down.

GL: Nature always wins. Every hundred thousand years Seattle will be covered in ice. Homeland security will affect privacy and speed. It will be a matter of slowing people down so that they can be checked.

Q: Are the panelists going to be part of the process in the future? Who will be working on transportation in the future? I see that SDOT is involved, but I don't see WSDOT and the viaduct is a state road.

GP: I am only involved as a panelist. This is just the beginning of the process.

The Work Ahead

Richard Conlin, Seattle City Council

- Seattle has always valued civic engagement and participatory design
- We are trying to shape a new history for the waterfront
- A vision isn't enough
- A vision has to be shared for it to come into being
- We need to engage all of the people with the resources tools and authority to make things happen
- We need to engage all of the concerned citizens who are not in those positions of power
- We need to engage the citizens of Seattle and the region
- The waterfront matters to everyone in the region and they have a right to be involved
- We need the collective wisdom of all of these people
- We need their financial support and to make sure they do not oppose this project
- How do we get them involved?
- We need a 21st century town meeting
- A major public gathering in one year
- Modeled after the public process to gather ideas for Ground Zero in New York

Sharon Sutton, Seattle Design Commission

- We are ready for the next step in the "ping-pong" game
- We need public participation to drive the vision
- Then we need experts who raise our expectations

- Thursday night we got input from the public to drive the vision
- A great waterfront should be public
- There should be nodes that provide connections
- The waterfront should be diverse
- We should look beyond the industrial history of the waterfront and toward the natural ecology
- Transportation is a key to the success of the waterfront

Comments from Michael Sorkin

- Process in New York was not as democratic as it appeared
- Should be wary of public processes that manufacture consent
- Be careful that wayfinding does not dumb-down the waterfront
- Sometimes it is good to get lost